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MORRIS McLEMORE IN MIAMI

Peek At A Man Who Bar- gained For Life

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One snow and slush morning of last January, in Washington, there was no special hurry, for it was Saturday and only a couple of things needed attention in the office.

The radio beeped a loud signal.

The announcer came on with a bulletin. He said Francis Gary Powers and another American accused of espionage by the Russians had been swapped for Col. Rudolf Abel, a top Communist agent nailed by the FBI.

During the ensuing discussion, the announcer made no mention of how Powers — of the U-2 plane that caused a summit conference to explode in President Eisenhower's face — was sprung from the prison where he was held by the Russians.

I hurried to the White House for details. The President was vitally interested in the case, naturally, and his man, Pierre Salinger, had called the early-morning press conference that released the news initially.

The stop by Salinger's office was profitable. He gave a rundown on what information was available, including the name of the man who had negotiated the release. — Salinger refused to call it a "swap" — and this was the first any of us had heard of James B. Donovan.

Today, and for some time to come, we should hear much more of Mr. Donovan. He has been commissioned to negotiate with the Castro government of Cuba for release of prisoners who remain from the force involved in the invasion at Bay of Pigs, a year ago last April.

Any prominence he might gain now or as a candidate for the United States Senate or bossing a department or agency will be small skimption, however, to the excitement he created when he sprang Powers.

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The first rather searching article I've seen on the interesting Mr. Donovan is available right now on newstands, in the September issue of "True" in which Jimmy Breslin has a look at the balding lawyer.

Breslin, a sports writer type who knows what to look for, found Donovan a paradoxical figure — the typical, 46-year-old Wall Street lawyer who goes to and from his 15-room Brooklyn apartment in a chauffeured limousine; then relaxes with chatter on innumerable subjects, while toying with cunningly contrived umbrellas that suddenly turn into swords of '38's . . .

" . . . You expect to come onto somebody big and flashy, you are hit instead with a quiet man sitting in a big, gray-carpeted office,"

says Breslin. "He has on an inconspicuous brown suit, with the vest. The tie is maroon. He is short and stocky but not fat. The silver hair is brushed straight back . . . His face never changes expression and his words go carefully around a subject . . ."

And then there's another Donovan. The one who sat down for breakfast with his wife one morning last spring and talked of the exciting news of that day — John Glenn's flight around the earth. "Look at this, Glenn," suggested Mrs. Donovan, "Why don't you do something like that? — you don't do a damn thing."

During World War II, Jim Donovan was one of the workers in the OSS of Bill Donovan (no kin), and had considerable experience in the workings of spies and such in Central Europe. After the war, he assisted Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson at the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi chiefs . . .

How did he later become Col. Abel's lawyer in the defense of this important Russian agent? Mostly, according to Breslin, because Abel was sharp enough to ask the Brooklyn Bar Association to find him a lawyer, rather than accept just anybody appointed by the court.

After searching for days for a good lawyer who would take the case, the bar association man, Lynn Goodnough, suddenly remembered a speech about the Nuremberg Trials delivered by Jim Donovan before an audience loaded with Americans of German extraction . . . Donovan's talents were obvious to him . . .

Later, as a private citizen, Jim Donovan managed the Powers deal with Abel, whose life he saved after a fierce fight based on what he called an illegal 3-day detention of the Russian when he was first collared . . . the fight paid off.

It let the Russians know that Jim Donovan would do what he said he would do and that he wasn't a man to fool with, going or coming his way.

That, apparently, was why he was able to deal them out of Powers and Frederic L. Pryor for a man they never admitted had ever worked an hour for the Russian government Rudolf Abel.